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# Operationalizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the Marketplace

## Abstract

Race is integral to the functioning and ideological underpinnings of marketplace actions yet remains undertheorized in marketing. To understand and transform the insidious ways in which race operates, we examine its impact in marketplaces and how these effects are shaped by intersecting forms of systemic oppression. We introduce Critical Race Theory (CRT) to the marketing community as a useful framework for understanding consumers, consumption, and contemporary marketplaces. We outline critical theory traditions as utilized in marketing and specify the particular role of CRT as a lens through which scholars can understand marketplace dynamics. We delineate key CRT tenets and how they may shape the way we conduct research, teach, and influence practice in the marketing discipline. To clearly highlight CRT's overall potential as a robust analytical tool in marketplace studies, we elaborate on the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to consumption markets. Our analysis demonstrates how CRT can support an enhanced understanding of the role of race in markets and lead us to a more equitable version of the marketplace than what currently exists. Beyond mere procedural modifications, applying CRT to marketplace studies mandates a paradigm shift in how marketplace equity is understood and practiced.

*Keywords:* Critical Race Theory; hierarchy; race; racialization; racism; social structure, Artificial Intelligence

# **Operationalizing Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the Marketplace**

## **Introduction**

From leveraging Black culture as a marketing strategy (Crockett 2008) to the ways in which hidden racial biases shape the sharing economy (Rhue 2019), race plays a large part in consumer experiences and outcomes in global marketplaces. Such high-profile brands as Prada, Gucci, Dove, and H&M have recently experienced significant public reproach as a result of their ill-considered deployments of racial signifiers. Moreover, researchers are increasingly documenting and exposing widespread and persistent racial bias and discrimination on prominent digital platforms such as Facebook, Craigslist, Uber, and Airbnb. Research also reveals how race marginalizes and materially disadvantages people of color (POC) and demonstrates the persistence of race as an integral aspect of the functioning and ideological underpinnings of marketplace actions. Finally, research increasingly illustrates the myriad ways in which pervasive race-related marketing dynamics such as the surveillance of Black consumers while traveling and shopping can negatively influence consumer well-being (Bone, Christensen, and Williams 2014; Harrison 2019; Johnson, Thomas, Harrison, and Grier 2019; Thomas 2013).

In 2020, Black Lives Matter and Black liberationist activism galvanized in response to fatal police brutality and violence inflicted upon Black Americans George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor among others. The increased visibility of grassroots efforts to tackle structural anti-Blackness is arguably shaping marketplace and public policy activity. Brands and organizations across a wide range of industries are engaging in public conversations regarding racism, anti-Blackness, and intersecting oppressions. However, the reactionary

gestures of companies have been criticized for the potentially short-term, superficial, and solely symbolic nature of their responses, which may be perceived as “woke-washing”—branding activity that opportunistically alludes to Black social justice activism (Sobande 2020).

Race is a specious classification that assigns human worth and social status using White persons as the model of humanity and the pinnacle of human achievement (Omi and Winant 2014). Forged historically through oppression, slavery, and conquest, the race construct has persisted over time because false notions of racial difference have become embedded in the beliefs and behaviors of societies. This embedding, also known as racism, affects the health and well-being of individuals and communities (Crockett and Grier 2020), stifles opportunities and growth, and impacts all modes of exchange across diverse markets<sup>1</sup> (Blackwell and Kramer 2017).

Historically, access to markets was granted via a racist hierarchy steeped in colonial and imperialist practices that sought to legitimize White privilege and power (e.g., Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2005). Today, many once overtly racist practices are now interwoven into the logic of post-Colonial contemporary marketplaces through taken-for-granted marketing strategies such as target marketing, (reverse) redlining, and consumer profiling (Grier, Thomas, and Johnson 2017). These strategies illustrate how race remains an essential marketing tool and key site of hierarchy in the global marketplace (Johnson, Thomas, and Grier 2017), as race itself is commodified and served up as a unique selling proposition, often to the detriment of producers

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<sup>1</sup> We conceptualize markets as “socially constructed fields of social interaction and systems/networks of exchange featuring a wide range of valued assets and resources.....Marketplace, in our formulation, includes sites of cultural interchange, exchanges of service, as well as brokering in political power, ideology, and persuasion. Accordingly, marketplaces are envisioned as broad and inclusive formulations that incorporate arenas of retail, finance, housing, health care, politics, education, advertising, employment, media, religion, and the like” (Johnson, Thomas, Harrison and Grier 2019, p. 8).

and consumers (Crockett 2008). Reducing racial inequity has substantial benefits for society beyond the clear need for racial harmony. For example, racial discrimination in the healthcare system not only leads to distrust and disengagement among consumers of color, but the U.S. economy also loses an estimated \$309 billion per year from the direct and indirect costs of health disparities (Blackwell and Kramer 2017).

Despite the continuing significance of race in the marketplace, there is a dearth of critically oriented race-related research in marketing. This exists despite mobilization of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and critical investigations of the sociocultural and sociopolitical aspects of marketplaces. The limited scholarship that does focus on race is largely marginalized and is all but absent from top-ranked marketing journals. In a review of literature on marketing and racism, Davis (2018) identified only 75 scholarly articles and books published between the 48-year span of 1969 and 2017. Claytor (2017) evidenced a decline in publications focused on Black consumers in highly ranked marketing journals since the 1970s and found that the vast majority of the published articles approached race superficially or in ways antithetical to how race is actually experienced in the marketplace.

Thus, the marketing field currently finds itself in an unfortunate quandary with respect to race, propagating scholarship that insufficiently engages with race or wholly neglects it. Marketing scholarship has undertheorized market-based racism as well as the racist operation of power and White supremacy within market spaces. While there is a wealth of research on race across other disciplines, marketing is missing a cohesive critical perspective that orients realities of power, privilege, and oppression within existing marketing strategies and an overall framework that promotes inclusive, fair, and just marketplaces (Grier, Thomas, and Johnson 2017). Addressing such issues is necessary to effectively challenge structural racial inequalities

and improve consumer well-being, particularly as race-related controversies and disparities in markets continue worldwide.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a path forward in which scholarship on race and marketplaces is no longer outsourced to social sciences and humanities colleagues. As with gender, race needs to be analyzed as more than an individual difference variable, as it is a key “cognitive construct, cultural category and political concept” (Schroeder 2003, p. 1) that intersects with the entire realm of consumption activities and cannot be disconnected from the realities of racism. To understand and transform the ways in which race and racism operate within markets, it is vital that the role of race be made explicit when examining its dynamics in the marketplace. To accomplish such an undertaking, we use Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is a praxis-oriented framework that recognizes that racism is ingrained in the fabric of global society yet may manifest differently across geo-cultural contexts. It is considered “a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the Academy with the community” (Parker and Villapando 2007, p. 520).

While contemporary discourses on race and racism in many other fields of study draw on CRT, marketplace research has not seen analogous engagement. This oversight exists despite the theory’s apparent overlap with the transformative consumer research (TCR) movement. Akin to CRT, core tenets of TCR include highlighting sociocultural and situational contexts, improving well-being, partnering with consumers and their caretakers, and employing rigorous theory and methods (Mick et al. 2012). With this paper, we (1) enhance marketing thought by presenting an overview of CRT as a conceptual framework useful for analysis in marketplace research, and (2) operationalize and situate CRT within the unique complexities that accompany marketing scholarship, social marketing efforts, and the development of marketing-related public policy.



We begin by delineating the nature of Critical Theory (CT) as the paradigm that has long been considered in marketplace studies. Second, we discuss the overlapping and distinguishing characteristics that exist between CRT and CT. Third, we highlight the contributions and limitations of CT to marketplace studies. Fourth, we offer our operationalization of CRT for marketplace studies as a means of extending CT's contributions and addressing its limitations while demonstrating the relevance of CRT to Transformative Consumer Research. Fifth, we describe the core tenets of CRT and present diverse examples to illustrate the practical implications of each tenet. We also elaborate on one example, the application of artificial intelligence to consumption markets, in order to clearly highlight CRT's overall potential as a robust analytical tool in marketplace studies. We close by providing important considerations for operationalizing CRT in marketplace research aimed at transforming consumer well-being. Thus, our conceptual contribution is to endorse a way of seeing and provide a roadmap to direct the path forward (MacInnis 2011).

## **Literature Review**

### **Beyond Critical Theory Traditions in Marketplace Studies**

Critical theoretical approaches recognize and critique systemic power relations with an intention to contribute to structural change. Critical scholars emphasize the need for “action-oriented programs of research aimed at improving society and the lives of consumers” (Murray et al. 1994, p. 559). Critical marketplace studies tend to involve a critique of capitalism and acknowledge that the marketplace is not a neutral site. Marketplace contexts are identified as inherently political with social and structural relations that connect to inequalities, including but not limited to “ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and physical (dis)ability”

(Henderson and Williams 2013, p. 1). CT maintains a focused skepticism towards the notion of universal objectivity and contextualizes social and historical relations in a way that accounts for the influence of different subjectivities. Research mobilized by CT can help to demystify power struggles and support efforts to dismantle entrenched hierarchical marketplace dynamics.

Marketplace studies buttressed by CT commonly include a call to action as part of their analyses of societal inequalities and a recommendation of potential ways to combat them. For example, such CT work usually includes critical accounts “of the historical and cultural conditions (both social and personal) on which the theorist’s own intellectual activity depends” (Calhoun 1995, p. 35). CT marketplace studies often express a concern with values, principles, and what ought to be, rather than focusing exclusively on what is happening in the here and now. At its core, a critical theoretical position is motivated by an aim to address societal issues with the use of social theories that aid understanding of matters regarding power, people, place, and politics (Tadajewski 2010). CT is applied in a range of scholarship addressing such significant topics as social identity, inequality, and ideology. Within marketplace studies, critical theory often serves as a specific theoretical framework that focuses primarily on issues of class, capitalism, and economics (e.g., Tadajewski and Brownlie 2008).

Although CT scrutinizes capitalism and class-based hierarchies, this work does not place an equal focus on issues concerning race, despite a long history in which the marketplace has been termed racist (Dávila 2008). Much of prior research about different racial and ethnic groups is based on dated concepts related to race and ethnicity and tend to homogenize minority groups (Williams 1995). Burton’s (2002) conceptualization of Critical Multicultural Marketing Theory addresses issues linked to race, ethnicity, and culture in the marketplace. Although related, inquiries based on ethnicity, class, and multiculturalism often elude the complex power dynamics

inherent to race (Thomas, Cross, and Harrison 2018). As such, a focus on multiculturalism or ethnicity is inadequate for investigating racism and White supremacy in the marketplace.

Thus, a shift from a conglomeration of many sites of privilege/oppression (e.g., “multicultural”) to a distinct and potentially all-encompassing site of privilege/oppression (e.g., “race”) is needed to more deeply understand how racialized power dynamics operate in the marketplace. Understanding the complex, nuanced, and fluid power dynamics between race and the marketplace demands focused attention to racialization, the process by which racial identities are assigned to groups based on physical attributes, social practices, and/or social alignments (Omi and Winant 2014). We call for focused, as opposed to singular, attention to racialized identities. As we will discuss in detail below, a critical examination of race requires situating it in the dialectical relationship shared with other ascribed and elected identity coordinates. Pivoting to a focus on racialization will aid analysis and efforts to address market-based racial inequities as part of an approach underpinned by social justice goals and recognition of knowledge yielded by the lived experiences of people of color (Dotson 2015). This approach is attuned to how the TCR “sensibility welcomes challenges to established perspectives, findings, and theories” and “seeks to enhance consumer well-being by tackling some of the more difficult and intractable social problems” (Crockett, Downey, Firat, Ozanne and Pettigrew 2013, p. 1171). Further, a research approach that focuses on matters concerning racism and intersecting oppressions in marketplace settings can highlight issues concerning white supremacy and colonial legacies that are rarely foregrounded in critical research on marketing.

### **Towards a Tradition of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Marketplace Studies**

In contributing to a burgeoning scholarship in marketing that addresses issues of race and consumer inequality (Ekpo, DeBerry-Spence, Henderson, and Cherian 2018; Grier and Davis 2013; Henderson, Hakstian, and Williams 2016) and establishes understandings of the marketplace (Burton 2009; Johnson, Thomas, Harrison and Grier 2019), we apply key tenets of Critical Race Theory (see Table 1). These tenets guide our analysis and expose the ways in which racial domination is reproduced, naturalized, and contested in the marketplace. We then apply them to a current example, facial recognition, to illustrate how they support an understanding of the role of race and to guide transformative consumer research efforts.

### *Social Justice*

At the core of CRT is the objective of challenging the pervasiveness and societal impact of White supremacy. Thus, “CRT has a fundamental commitment to a social justice agenda that struggles to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, generation, status, and class subordination” (Parker and Villalpando 2007, p. 520). In the marketing context, we use the phrase ‘social justice’ to signify fairness and equity in distributions, procedures, and interactions related to marketing scholarship, practice, and pedagogy (see also Grier 2019). TCR affirms that “advocacy positions are necessary to engage in research that responds to social problems” (Crockett, Downey, Firat, Ozanne and Pettigrew 2012, p. 1176). In marketing literature, however, social justice has yet to be extensively examined in connection with CRT or racial issues (see Grier, Thomas and Johnson 2017; Steinfield et al. 2019). Rather, social justice is most often an implicit goal such as in research which criticizes marketing practices. Consider research which links racially targeted food marketing to negative consumer outcomes (e.g., Grier and Davis 2013). Such research has an unstated function of addressing market failures and provides companies with ‘a moral compass’ to ameliorate situations and respond through positive

marketing (Stoeckl and Luedick 2015). In so doing, it may invariably expose social and economic inequality, even if it is not explicitly labeled as social justice research.

The social justice tenet has important implications for the way we think about marketing. For example, corporations are continually apologizing for racist behaviors that include: employees discriminating against non-White customers by calling the police, over-surveilling them as they shop, seating them at undesirable tables, or marketing and selling products portraying racist stereotypes (Johnson et al. 2019). While such issues have been highlighted in marketing literature, none have been investigated from a critical race perspective (Crockett et al. 2003). Traditional approaches in marketing consider these isolated incidents where racist behavior is called out and the company is recognized for acknowledging the problem and apologizing. In contrast, a CRT social justice perspective would consider the role of structural racism and provide action-oriented steps for systemic transformation.

#### *Centrality and Permanence of Race and Racism*

CRT recognizes the enduring pervasiveness of racism—from individual private thoughts to personal relationships, workplaces, institutions (e.g., marketplace), and systems (e.g., education, healthcare, justice system; Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Thus, racism is not the sum of prejudicial actions and individual attitudes (Bonilla-Silva 2015) but a state of mind embedded in our psyches, culture, systems, and institutions. Given that racism is pervasive throughout society, it has become a way of life, a fact of everyday “ordinary” experience (Essed 1991), especially for people of color. Moreover, racism and racialized incidents are experiences that affect all members of a society regardless of racial affiliation or identification. Thus, CRT establishes that race serves as a social construct that invokes, distributes, and restricts hierarchical power and privilege among racialized bodies (ibid).

A key principle of CRT is the unequivocal recognition that White supremacy is a dominant and oppressive force in society that must be challenged. While White supremacy is commonly associated with interpersonal and group-level instances of White identity extremism (e.g., neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members), CRT extends the construct to include the myriad ways in which Whiteness is centered, normalized, and privileged via taken-for-granted social structures, formal and informal policies, and cultural practices (Daniels 1997). For instance, the practice of redlining, the systematic denial or limiting of products and services to residents of a particular area based on race or ethnicity, is more likely to negatively impact the lives of POC (D’Rozario and Williams 2005).

A CRT approach of treating racism as pervasive diverges from mainstream approaches in marketing research wherein race is often used as a variable to detect disparities between groups rather than as a unit of analysis in and of itself. Research questions that center on how the behaviors and attitudes of POCs deviate from dominant societal norms prevail in mainstream marketing research. These approaches often set a standard or deem some (arbitrary) criteria as important in determining whether someone is worthy of privileges. For example, two KB Toy stores within very close proximity enforced vastly different payment policies, of which the only difference was the racial makeup of the residents in each location (Henderson, Hakstian, and Williams 2016). Patrons of the affluent and mainly Black location were made to present copious forms of identification, whereas patrons of the affluent and mainly White location received no such demand. A CRT examination of such privilege-granting policies illustrates how “racism is routine, not exceptional” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017).

*Challenge to Dominant Ideology*

Undertaking marketplace studies with a CRT lens challenges dominant ideological concepts such as neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, meritocracy, and other ideologies used to reinforce the realities of White privilege and Whiteness. In examining existing power structures, CRT-based approaches emphasize that ideological claims are ways in which privileged groups camouflage their interests in order to maintain the status quo. CRT also recognizes that dominant ideologies support ignorance of the inequalities that systemic and institutional racism supports and perpetuates. In contrast, mainstream perspectives often treat racial inequality as an aberration rather than a natural byproduct of a system of racial domination (Bonilla-Silva, 2015).

A CRT lens also necessitates learning from knowledge generated outside of formal academic environments and upholding a critical understanding of the racial politics of knowledge production processes. For example, CRT recognizes citational practice as politically embedded within the knowledge production marketplace of academia, which itself is steeped in histories of racism that have resulted in epistemic erasures of marginalized knowledges and research (Dotson 2015). Consequently, CRT scholars read and reference the writing of individuals whose social positions and lived experiences mean that their understandings of structural racism are not based on intellectual intrigue alone.

The contrast between CRT and mainstream approaches in the marketing literature is evident in the way that the mainstream seeks to align populations under an umbrella ideal arbitrarily agreed upon, perpetuated as ‘objective,’ and deemed important. For instance, consider the recent embrace of ‘total market’ advertising by mainstream marketing researchers and practitioners. Akin to its global advertising precursor, total market-persuasive communication attempts to develop and disseminate a universally accepted message across a multicultural consumer base—concentrating on perceived commonalities across groups rather than

differences. This illusory privileged ideal is perceptible in the idea of Eurocentric features such as standards of beauty, patronage, and even product design.

Consider also how for many years people of color have been relegated to the ‘ethnic aisle’ for such consumer goods as hair products, personal care items, and food. Here, the term ‘ethnic’ perpetuates racist ideologies. In the case of product design, the issue of ‘flesh’ tone has long been of concern to POC, as one’s flesh tone is relative to the color of their skin. Yet, the actual tone/color of offerings for products like Band-aids, panty hose, and ballet shoes have typically corresponded to those racialized as White, further normalizing Whiteness and leaving non-White consumers without viable options. Bennett et al. (2016) discuss how this form of exclusion perpetuates marketplace traumas, whereby such consumers are “othered” in their interactions with the market, and in the failure of marketers and policymakers to acknowledge or intervene in such transgressions.

#### *Authority of Experiential Knowledge*

CRT acknowledges knowledge inherent to the lived experiences of those who are subject to structural racism (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). This knowledge is reflected primarily in “storytelling and counterstorytelling,” which foregrounds people of color in “counter-stories, parables, and chronicles aimed at revealing the contingency, cruelty, and self-serving nature of the power-laden beliefs” (p. 139). The experiential knowledge tenet serves to uplift and centralize the lived experience of POC as a legitimate source of knowledge production—unlike mainstream scholarship where knowledge production is the sole domain of academics (Delgado and Stefancic 2017).

In marketing, a number of methodological perspectives incorporate lived experiences into knowledge production. For instance, scholars and marketing practitioners alike can create “thick



description” from ethnographic observation and interviews that yield “multilayered interpretations of market phenomena” (Arnould and Wallendorf 1994, p. 484). This methodological approach takes into account the subjective experiences of consumers (*emic*) and the subjective cultural, interpretative experiences of researchers (*etic*). Other approaches to understanding consumer lived experiences include hermeneutical (Thompson 1997), existential phenomenological (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989), experiential (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), participatory action (Hill et al. 2015), case studies (Grier and Johnson 2011), videography (Grier and Perry 2018), poetry (Sherry and Schouten 2002) and autobiographical consumer research (Brown 1998). With a few exceptions, most of this scholarship remains inaccessible to consumers once produced. Importantly, despite the diverse interpretative approaches and social change-oriented academic collectives such as TCR which examine lived experience, few studies use race as the “site of social inequality” (Donnor and Ladson-Billings 2017). A few notable examples include Crockett (2017), Davis (2018), Grier, Thomas and Johnson (2017), Grier and Johnson (2011), and the efforts of other scholars in the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) Research Network (e.g., Johnson, Thomas, Harrison and Grier 2019).

By extension, at the marketing practice level, there is a similar lack of attention to race and other structural issues that prevent practitioners from deeply examining the role of “power and privilege differentials” in the marketplace. In particular, marketing research and practice are afflicted by a type of colorblindness, “where people discount race when they make decisions” (Donnor and Ladson-Billings 2017, p. 197). This is observed in the way “color-blind racism operates in the tech industry” (Daniels 2015, p. 1377). For example, crowd-based marketplaces embrace seemingly neutral values such as trust, yet arguably reinforce racial identities and bias in the market (Rhue 2019). At the same time, color-blind solutions to reduce bias such as “racial

anonymity and automation, are insufficient and serve to devalue POC” (Rhue 2015, p. 206).

These areas merit scholarly and public policy attention given the growing dependence on facial recognition within public services, travel, immigration services, and transportation.

### *The Interdisciplinary/Transdisciplinary Perspective*

CRT scholars seek to construct innovative and multifaceted approaches to the study of race and racism by merging and/or working across disciplinary boundaries. Consequently, CRT should not be conceptualized as a standalone theory that explicates the role of race in society. Rather, CRT operates as a synthesizing analytical framework where critical experiences emerging from diverse disciplines coalesce. The citation section of a CRT scholar’s publication will demonstrate the variety of fields used to analytically ‘make sense’ of society’s racial dynamics at a given moment in time. For instance, when introducing CRT to the field of public relations, Pompper (2005) applied key concepts from a wide cross-section of disciplines such as communication, feminism, organizational theory, and queer studies. Diverse approaches enable rigorous analysis of the interdependency of racism and capitalism, such as histories of slavery and exploitation that underpin contemporary markets. Hence, a CRT approach is shaped by extant work on the racist roots of many marketplace dynamics. In fact, we represent scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines, expertise, specializations, and approaches<sup>2</sup>. Thus, our paper contributes to marketing studies, as well as extends legal, education, sociology, media, and culture CRT studies. Guided by such foundational work, our paper provides a blueprint for understanding and operationalizing CRT in the marketplace.

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<sup>2</sup> This manuscript emerges from the Race in the Marketplace (RIM) track at the 2019 Transformative Consumer Research dialogical conference at Florida State University in which our multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-disciplinary collective of scholars and a practitioner were afforded the opportunity to theorize the role of race across different types of markets and diverse racialized groups.

Consumer research and public policy analyses in marketing are also characteristically interdisciplinary. In fact, TCR has a tradition of “using a broad theoretical lens and a wide array of epistemological approaches” (Davis and Pechmann 2019: p. 1168). Furthermore, for TCR’s dialogical conferences, teams are encouraged to include practitioners or scholars from disciplines outside of marketing. To push the boundaries of our thinking even further, CRT also uses *transdisciplinary* methods, conceptualized as both a specific kind of interdisciplinary research involving scientific and non-scientific sources or practice and a new form of learning and problem solving involving cooperation among different parts of society, including academia, in order to meet the complex challenges of society (McGregor 2004). Using both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, CRT allows for a multifaceted examination of intersecting structural oppression that impacts marketplace experiences, public spaces, and society in general. Thus CRT aligns with TCR principles that affirm the benefits of teams that bring “a broader range of knowledge, expertise, and resources to the research task” (Crockett et al. 2013, p. 1172).

Because the pervasiveness of structural racism and White privilege is such that it manifests in many different but interconnected domains and settings, to effectively analyze and address associated problems there is a need to understand and tackle interrelated issues that span the central focus of many different yet linked disciplines. As Crockett et al. (2013, p. 1173) observe, a significant challenge involved in assembling teams of researchers from distinct disciplinary backgrounds “is reconciling the competing world views and methodological approaches of different disciplines.” However, a shared commitment to challenging structural racism, paired with an openness to exploring new methodologies and learning from the differing disciplinary perspectives of peers can facilitate fruitful collaboration that nurtures robust critical inquiry and generative scrutiny of stifling disciplinary norms.

The interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approach has important implications for the way we think about marketing and public policy. Work using these methods can enable productive knowledge sharing and the formulation of novel approaches to address societal issues and offer a new understanding of the world, in addition to aiding forms of reflexivity that result in expansive understandings of different disciplines and their future direction. Bridging gaps across disciplines—indeed, even outside all disciplines—creates a powerful and nuanced approach for engaging with race and racism. There is no one answer, one discipline, or one path. With CRT, use of all tools in the toolbox is encouraged.

### *Intersectionality*

Although CRT centers race and racism as its analytical focal point, it does not ignore other identity coordinates from which experiences of privilege and oppression emerge. Intersectionality, an analytic framework attributed to critical race and legal studies scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), identifies the unique ways in which privilege and oppression are experienced as a result of overlapping social stratifications, and enables CRT scholars to address how race and racism impact and are impacted by other forms of structural oppression, including but not limited to sexism, classism, ableism, and homophobia. Intersectionality also provides the analytic breadth to capture the fluidity and dynamism of race by recognizing how other social constructs change the way that race and racism are expressed, experienced, and internalized.

Scholarship that investigates the relationship between consumption and identity typically utilizes a single-context framework in which only one contextual factor, such as race or gender orientation, is examined (Thomas 2013). Yet consumers do not have a racialized marketplace experience that is wholly separate from their gendered experience; each is constantly informed by the other. Much of the research around consumer identity conceptualizes identity categories

as distinct and fixed (Grier et al. 2017). Such conceptualizations do not account for how identity sites co-create varying marketplace experiences due to their overlapping and intersecting nature with each other and with social structures. As such, consumer research has largely provided abstract snapshots of how identities are represented and experienced in market settings. While this form of inquiry has provided considerable insights into consumption and identity, it is far from representative of consumers' lived experiences. Consumers navigate multiple identities that constantly shift in importance and involvement. Some consumer researchers have already incorporated intersectionality theory into their scholarship (e.g., Thomas 2013), and as a result their work more actively engages with the reality of consumers' marketplace experiences.

Importantly, intersectionality also demonstrates how overlapping social stratifications *modulate* how privilege and oppression are experienced. As the concept has found its way into society's mainstream, intersectionality is often misconstrued as meaning that overlapping social stratifications merely intensify the experience of privilege and oppression. While this distinction is subtle, it holds deep import. In order to understand how overlapping social stratifications modulate the lived experience, underlying and associative structural elements must be critically interrogated (Emejulu and Sobande 2019). Otherwise, race, gender, class, and other social identities can become essentialized, presumed as fixed, and considered mutually exclusive. This can lead to purely additive approaches, a practice characterized as the "Oppression Olympics" (Martinez 1993). Recent TCR perspectives have noted this potential, calling for a transformative intersectionality approach to studying oppressive forces and practices that moves beyond adding more social identity characteristics (Steinfeld et al. 2019).

Intersectionality as conceptualized by CRT requires deploying praxis-based methodologies that capture the interdependence of identity coordinates and produce findings that

more closely illustrate the lived experience of consumers. This approach is evident in Dhillon-Jamerson's (2019) analysis of online matrimonial advertisements in India, in which she conceptualizes race and gender as co-constitutive rather than mutually exclusive with regard to how matchmaking is experienced. Rather than simply 'adding' the experience of race to that of gender, she investigates the myriad ways race and gender amalgamate to produce distinct sets of matchmaking tactics and coping mechanisms among individuals seeking a spouse. Her approach moves the analysis and findings from abstraction closer to mirroring true-to-life experiences.

*Example Application: The Case of Artificial Intelligence*

In both theory and practice, artificial intelligence (AI) is dramatically transforming industries, institutions, workplaces, and consumer behavior (Hymas 2019). To further illustrate the value of using a CRT lens to explore marketplace actions and protocol, we apply CRT to the development and utilization of a form of AI technology, facial recognition.

Facial recognition technology is a tool used to help accelerate marketing activities and offer conveniences meant to assist consumers in the consumption process (e.g., automatic logins, personalization). It is often touted as a race-, gender-, and otherwise bias-free solution to making decisions and/or performing marketing tasks in an objective manner. However, a major issue identified with such software has been in its inability to detect darker skin tones, and more specifically, it has misidentified people of color as non-human (often as animals or objects; Noble 2018). Moreover, AI algorithms tend to perform best on images of White men and worst on images of Black women (Buolamwini and Gebru 2018). As is the case with artificial intelligence generally, the accuracy of facial recognition tools depends on a machine's ability to detect algorithms 'taught' to it through the use of data sets curated by *human* engineers. Consequently, machine learning can perpetuate racial biases that exist in society (Hymas 2019).

Studies in marketing which address the use of AI technologies generally emphasize how consumer experiences are enhanced through AI-powered applications and assume that the impact is equal across all consumers. Such assumptions ignore disparities in lived experiences and research evidence points to inherent (automated) bias in such technology. As facial recognition becomes more of a norm in the marketplace—used to unlock smartphones, advertise special offers, verify identification for air travel, and more—debates have focused on whether this technology is a good thing for society. Accordingly, the Federal Trade Commission (2016) has recommended that companies consider the legal and ethical implications of their use of big data. CRT would refocus efforts on the potential for automation bias.

For example, there is a larger failure rate in recognition software within autonomous/self-driving cars when it attempts to detect whether an object encountered on the street is human or non-human when the object in question is a POC (Noble 2018). This example illustrates how race is a marker of distributed privilege. A POC's existence often goes unacknowledged when misidentified as 'non-human,' which speaks to their invisibility and sociohistorical experience in marketplaces of dehumanization. It also speaks to how perspectives of color, marginalized people, or voices on the margins are decentered as against the dominant ideology of White privilege. The continued insistence that AI is unbiased, despite many calls to the inherent biases that result in disparate outcomes for POC, speaks to a refusal to acknowledge their lived experience and is therefore an intentional ignorance. Nonetheless, the designers of such algorithms are not held accountable. Ignorance of biased algorithms not only exacerbate the issue, but also possibly endanger many.

Absence of the experiential input of POC in the design, use, or institutional adoption of AI-based facial recognition is not surprising in the technology industry where “technical

workers—the coders, engineers, and data scientists...who are Black or Latinx rose by less than a percentage point since 2014.” This, despite public commitments by technology giants (Harrison 2019). Consequently, the experiential knowledge of POC is largely absent in the technology industry. Not surprisingly, this leads to the selective valorization of the lived experiences of White and Asian middle-class people, who are overrepresented in the technology industry.

The potential impact of AI-related racial bias on people’s lived experiences and its policy implications are of increasing concern to policymakers, corporate representatives, and consumer advocates, and deserve critical investigation. It is from a CRT perspective that we can acknowledge, further identify the source of, and correct such failures. CRT puts forward an active social justice agenda that in practice considers the pervasive role of structural racism and White privilege to understand the potential impact of AI technologies. It promotes a focus on eradicating racism by centering the experience of POC as AI applications are considered and taking a stance against the uncritical use of such tools. The interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approaches championed by CRT scholars and practitioners elevate interrelated policy, marketing, organizational, sociological, political, and historical dimensions of AI developments, including how contemporary facial recognition technology is shaped by centuries of state-sanctioned surveillance activities targeting racialized people. Finally, an intersectional approach further identifies how overlapping categories of identity, such as race and gender, modulate individualized experiences when analyzing the effectiveness and impacts of AI tools.

Our delineation of key CRT tenets and their application to artificial intelligence-based marketing challenges illustrates how these tenets can inform the way we think about and investigate issues regarding race in marketing and consumer research. The AI example also reflects the mutually reinforcing and potentially overlapping nature of the tenets. Consider how



the increasing evidence of bias inherent in AI applications and the observed color-blind racism in the tech industry (Daniels 2015, p. 1377) reflects the *centrality of racism* and highlights the need for both *challenges to dominant identity* and *social justice* considerations. At the same time, the lack of POC in the artificial intelligence industry contributes to an absence of *experiential knowledge* of darker skinned people generally, and specifically, Black women when viewed from an *intersectional* lens. Clearly, to understand issues of race and AI, an *interdisciplinary perspective* is necessary, particularly with regard to marketing dimensions. Despite potential overlap, each tenet identifies important conceptual and practical considerations related to the individual and structural dimensions of racial dynamics in markets.

A year after beginning this study at the 2019 TCR conference, brands have slowly begun to acknowledge the bias inherent in the (training) data on which AI is dependent. This newfound awareness, prompted by recent surges in racial consciousness raising and grassroots activism, has caused brands to adapt their AI applications. Moreover, as more stories have surfaced of AI applications gone wrong, brands such as IBM, a major player in the manufacturing of AI-driven technologies, have changed their policies to cease offering its general facial recognition technology to the public (Buolamwini 2020). These recent moves are forcing government and industry to take a hard look at their AI-related policies and practices.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The present research introduces CRT to the marketing community as an important framework for understanding consumers, consumption, and contemporary marketplaces. We outline critical theory traditions as utilized in marketing and position CRT as a lens through which to understand racial and racist marketplace dynamics. We then set forth the key tenets of

CRT and apply it to AI-powered facial recognition to illustrate how CRT offers a deeper understanding of racial dynamics in the marketplace. Next, we explain how CRT shapes the way we conduct research and influences practice in the marketing discipline by analyzing the impact of structural issues that significantly affect peoples' marketplace experiences. This novel area of marketing and consumer research has several important implications for transformative research at the intersection of marketing and public policy.

Marketing scholars can use CRT as a conceptual framework to guide the design, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of marketplace studies on race. This research should include specific concerns of practical relevance, especially as they relate to equity across groups in the marketplace. This focus aligns with the aims of TCR research, which emphasizes the creation of practical studies that “can be used by consumers, activists, policy makers, and businesses to improve consumer well-being” (Ozanne, Pettigrew, Crockett et al. 2011, p. 1). Issues of racial inequity abound in indicators of well-being across traditional TCR domains of study and are front-and-center in business, health, education, and housing, among other areas (Blackwell and Kramer 2017). The use of CRT can enhance efforts towards consumer well-being by explicitly addressing issues of race. We next turn to specific considerations for researchers who wish to utilize CRT and then highlight specific areas ripe for future research.

### **Expanding the Paradigm of Research on Race in the Marketplace**

Our discussion of CRT highlights that a paradigm shift must occur in how research examining race in the marketplace is understood and practiced as a first step to leveraging CRT to support racial equity and consumer well-being. A researcher's taken-for-granted assumptions, worldviews, and decisions on how to approach a research topic must be interrogated. Theories and frameworks encompass assumptions about how the world works and their use can shape or

constrain “the development, direction, and substance of ideas” (Hylton 2010, p. 337). CRT highlights alternative epistemological, ontological, methodological, and analytical approaches that are sensitive to the subtle and nuanced ways in which racism and race-related issues may present themselves in the marketplace. Among the many ways that CRT does this is by grounding research in an ideological and analytic position that recognizes how contemporary marketplace activity is inextricably linked to issues concerning race, racism, and racialization.

CRT practices standpoint epistemologies (Jones 2009). An outgrowth of Black feminist thought, standpoint epistemologies situate knowledge as the product of hierarchically valued social experiences and posits that the knowledge (social experiences) of dominant social groups is normalized as universal ‘truth,’ while the knowledge (social experiences) of subaltern social groups are marginalized, if not completely made invisible (Anderson 2020). As a consequence, the subaltern’s alternative ways of knowing, which typically possess an epistemic advantage over that of the dominant social group in topic areas associated with their subjugated status, are rendered null and void (Toole 2019). For example, community voice or the input of those most proximal to the focal topic may be ignored in favor of scholarly voice. More than an issue of omission and devaluation, CRT’s epistemological outlook positions subaltern knowledge as sites for uncovering insights that can lead to righteous transformation at macro and micro levels (Hemmings 2005). As such, their exclusion is deleterious to society as a whole. These epistemological groundings lead to fundamental changes in how CRT research is framed and conducted. A focus on impartiality, replication, and measurement gives way to a researcher reflexivity and specificity and thereby uncovers broad insights about singular experiences and naturalistic investigations of everyday life (Jones 2009).

Ontologically, CRT situates all social objects and relations as value-laden and subject to racial dynamics, and as such, neutrality and objectivity are considered mythic creations chimerical to the reality of social interactions (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). This framing of reality requires an embrace of methodological and analytical approaches that address racial normativity (rather than profess a colorblind ethos) and privilege the multifaceted, complex, and intersubjective personhood of racially subjugated social groups and the devalued knowledge they possess (Johnson, Thomas, Harrison, and Grier 2019). Unlike dominant ideologies that underpin many mainstream marketplace studies, a CRT framework is not based on pursuing the illusory goal of objectivity and value neutrality. Social justice, for example, involves an explicit focus rather than one that is implicit or intermittent. CRT also challenges the neoliberal notion that POC must pursue assimilationist and integrationist strategies (Crenshaw 2011) in order to achieve racial equality in predominantly White marketplace settings. Consequently, CRT provides ample scope for transformative research that challenges forms of racism in marketplace contexts and the White supremacist ideologies that incite them. CRT's omission of valorize neutrality, paired with the value it ascribes to experiential knowledge of POC, allows for a critical intervention in studies by affirming the importance of acknowledging "everyday forms of racism" (Huber and Solorzano 2019, p.223) and adopting different racialized subjectivities.

The ontological stance CRT necessitates, wherein racism is understood as a structural and systemic fixture of society (in addition to an interpersonal reality), fundamentally shifts the way in which race and racism in the marketplace are investigated. Rather than framing racist market actors and actions as central, CRT demands that individual instances of marketplace racism be linked to undergirding systems of racial power and contextualized within relevant histories of racial oppression. Ger (2018, p. 5) similarly indicates that as a field, marketing is focused on the

agentic individual and relational aspects of consumption and that there is significantly less emphasis on the “systemic dynamics—the structural, institutional, and political factors—which have a momentous bearing on inequality issues among consumers, and which restrain consumption practices, within and across markets and countries.” She further adds that “we need to explicitly analyze and unpack various power and privilege differentials that play out in the marketplace—and frame consumer choices and practices.” Ger’s perspective aligns with Grier, Thomas, and Johnson’s (2017, p. 91) call to “break race of its iconic standing and bring greater equity to markets by disseminating critical, collaborative, and transdisciplinary race-based market research that supports liberatory public policies and community actions.” As such, the key to abating marketplace racism no longer centers on advancing agentic options specific to consumers but rather exposing and radically transforming systems, policies, institutional norms, and dominant cultural expectations that are racially oppressive.

The work of Crockett, Grier, and Williams (2003) helps illustrate this important distinction. The article provides an astute analysis of the constellation of coping strategies utilized by African American men to combat marketplace discrimination. By concentrating on how, when, and why a specific racialized consumer group (i.e., African American men) uses coping mechanisms, the researchers magnify the import of individual agency and sideline the role of structural racism. This becomes evident in their analytic frame, which positions coping strategies as a means of reacting to racial stereotypes, which tend to be perceived and conceptualized as interpersonal. Alternatively, had the researchers applied CRT to their project, the coping strategies uncovered would have been interlinked with the inherently racist practices based on stereotypes associated with Black men, such as the transatlantic slave trade, Jim Crow-era indentured servitude, housing and school segregation, and the prison-industrial complex. This

example foregrounds the need for both agentic and systemic change. Consider the District of Columbia's recent *Flip the Script* campaign designed to "disrupt societal norms of how men and boys of color are perceived and how they perceive themselves" (D.C.Gov, 2019, p. 1). The campaign aims to disrupt systemic stereotypes that reinforce biases against men of color rather than solely emphasize individual coping strategies.

Acknowledgement of White privilege as the structuring logic of society fundamentally changes how marketing researchers conceptualize marketplace studies. Traditionally, marketing researchers have hyperfocused on the deficits found in marketplaces—lack of non-White representation in the marketing communication industries and the messages they craft, retail service failures experienced by racial minorities, and the strategies employed by racial minorities to cope with discriminatory marketplace experiences. Out of this fixation has come an abundance of important but at best partially effective policies and measures to address these issues. A CRT approach also requires an acknowledgement that privilege, too, is a marketplace reality (Johnson, Thomas and Grier 2017). Just as White privilege structures society, that same logic is interwoven into the functioning of markets. On average, White households in the United States have \$933,000 in accumulated wealth, while the average wealth among Black households is \$138,200. This is a 576% differential, and it has remained statistically the same for nearly the past fifty years (*The Economist* 2019).

The gaping wealth disparity is not solely due to Black consumers being denied wealth-building opportunities; it is also a result of wealth-building opportunities being specifically designed for and directed to White consumers. Consider a field study by Bone, Christensen and Williams (2014), which clearly demonstrates the barriers that minority consumers face. In that study, bank loan officers treated White and minority consumers differently in terms of the

information provided to them, the information required from them to apply for a loan, and the assistance offered. Achieving market equity thus depends not only on our ability to acknowledge and address the marginalization of consumers of color, but also on recognizing and dismantling the privileged status held by White consumers. As Thomas (2018, p. 10) quotes in his critique of inequities found in the advertising industry, “when you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.” Ultimately, the application of CRT in marketing encompasses an ontological and epistemological revalorization of race in marketplace studies. Valorization incorporates broader sociocultural and historical contexts (Torres and DeBerry-Spence 2019) and CRT grants value to race as a worthy subject of examination beyond its current use as an individual difference or its previously undesirable value as a scholarly marketing subject.

Finally, CRT challenges not only the epistemological and ontological assumptions about race in consumer markets but necessitates different methodological and analytical approaches. The use of CRT in practice thus requires that the researcher make race and racism forefront throughout the research process. Methodologies that emphasize race and experiential knowledge can build on researchers’ attention to their epistemological and ontological assumptions. Storytelling is “critical to understanding racial inequality” (Villapando 2004, p. 46) and serves as an important methodological tool for adhering to this epistemological shift brought by CRT (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). For instance, Villapando (2004, p. 46) argues that capturing the experiential knowledge of Latinx persons in the higher education marketplace serves as forms “of community memory, a source of empowerment and strength, and not as a deficit,” privileging “their experiences before and at college and the knowledge that has passed on to them by their family” through family histories, biographies, and parables. Other qualitative methods that explore the links between individual experience and structural reality, such as

discourse analysis, oral histories, and case studies, can be used to conduct research through a CRT lens. Approaches that link scholars with communities including photovoice, action research, and community-based participatory research methods are also well suited to apply CRT to marketing and consumer research questions. Scholars have also argued that traditional methods such as experiments and quantitative analyses might be used when implemented with the appropriate philosophical assumptions and anti-racist approaches (Sablan 2019). For example, Sablan (2019) combines CRT tenets with quantitative methods to assess community assets and counter the deficit-driven narratives of quantitative work often used to inform policy.

### **Opportunities to Transform Future Research on Race**

Our discussion of how CRT can inform our understanding of race in the marketplace lays a solid foundation for a wealth of future research to support consumer well-being. As our illustrative example shows, AI's potential impact on people's lived experiences, along with its public policy implications, are ripe for exploration. Beyond AI, there is also a need for research that reflects the lived experience and dynamics of race in the marketplace. Future research that forges a deeper understanding of race is especially important to the marketing field given changing demographics in the context of relatively limited research. As Frey (2018, p. 1) notes, POC are the primary source of growth in the nation's working age population, electorate, consumers, and tax base "as far into the future as we can see." As a result, POC will drive many of the key issues facing businesses, policy makers, and consumer advocates in contemporary marketplaces. Future research can leverage CRT to investigate traditional topics of interest to TCR scholars as well as break new ground with innovative topics.



CRT's commitment to social justice can fuel anti-racist research efforts to create more equitable marketplaces. A CRT lens enables studies that account for "how socially embedded inequities dictate the extent and manner by which discriminated out-groups can participate in the market" (Ekpo et al. 2018, p. 453). By reflecting on how racist structural oppression hampers the everyday lives of people, CRT-driven research can uncover the different ways in which racialized identities are experienced and how individuals attempt to resist racism, including in digital contexts that can simultaneously shield them from and expose them to certain racist encounters (Ekpo et al. 2018; Sobande et al. 2019). Ultimately, more nuanced consideration of race can lead to more effective and impactful solutions to race-related challenges.

A CRT approach can also facilitate understanding of different identities and can buttress work that foregrounds underexplored issues at the intersection of race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Arnould et al. 2019; Grier et al. 2017). Approaching research from an intersectional perspective can support understanding of unique experiences and outcomes for specific identity groups beyond broad racial categorizations. Studies might examine consumption issues with such clear racial components as the intersection of race and disability amidst recurrent tragedies (e.g., hurricanes, pandemics) or tackle experiences in caregiving at the intersection of gender and race. Such research should not simply be equated with 'identity research,' which "has sought to build a culturally relative understanding of consumer self-hood" (Arnould et al. 2019, p.100). Such approaches can also unearth power dynamics connected to the entanglements of race, religion, and globalization, as is demonstrated by the work of Johnson, Thomas and Grier (2017). CRT analysis underscores the need to better incorporate structural, institutional, political, and historical factors into the way we conceptualize and investigate race in the marketing context.

Media and marketing content can be rife with visual microaggressions which “are systemic, everyday visual assaults based on race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname that emerge in various mediums” (Huber and Solorzano 2015, p. 223). A CRT framework can support analysis that is sensitive to the intersectional nature of oppression and can thus advance policies that move beyond treating issues concerning visual racism and sexism in marketing communication as isolated from one another. CRT also fuels robust analysis of “visual and rhetorical racism” (European Race & Imagery Foundation 2016), including critiques of recent examples of Blackface in consumer culture. CRT connects such marketplace activity to decades of anti-Black oppression, from 19th century Black minstrel shows to contemporary portrayals and products from high-fashion designers.

The CRT framework can inform business schools and the Academy, particularly given the marketization of higher education (Johnson et al. 2019). As Dobscha and Hobgmark-Knudsen (2019) note, the cyclical nature of knowledge production and dissemination means that even when researchers create new ideas, the old ones continue to circulate in textbooks and journals. The authors’ critique highlights the value of using CRT to inform efforts to promote equity within the curriculum, faculty, and student body. Indeed, CRT is heavily applied in the area of education, and the emphasis is relevant to business schools under pressure to integrate issues of race and diversity. For example, employers desire to hire students who are astute about the realities of the marketplace yet have not questioned their preparedness to work with diverse others (Goodwin 2015). Research suggests that business students may operate from a colorblind perspective that leaves them unconscious of how various groups experience the marketplace (Garrett-Walker et al. 2018; Poole and Garrett-Walker 2016). Moreover, research which shows how markets exclude some consumers and privilege others based on race underscores how a

frame of reference for understanding social inequality is necessary for marketing pedagogy (Grier 2020). CRT presents a relevant framework as faculty train students in the racial reality of marketplaces worldwide. Specifically, CRT tenets provide a framework that complements the traditional emphasis on group characteristics in multicultural marketing courses with an understanding of structural issues underlying divergent marketplace experiences and outcomes.

Also consider that most business schools are challenged to attract and maintain a racially diverse faculty as the faculty remain predominantly White. For example, in the U.S., White faculty comprises almost 67% of full-time faculty at business schools amidst increasingly diverse student bodies (AACSB 2019). CRT can provide an overarching framework that considers the experiential knowledge of underrepresented faculty to understand institutional policies and practices intended to increase racial diversity in business schools. The faculty search, recruitment, tenure, and promotion processes are frequently driven by unremarked upon, colorblind, and merit-based approaches which CRT would call out as anything but neutral. For example, recent research utilizing CRT as an analytical framework for Black and Latinx faculty members' storytelling about their experiences on marketing search committees explains how typical institutional practices may hinder the racial diversity of faculty (Grier and Poole, 2020).

As we write this article, humanity is facing a worldwide pandemic prompted by COVID-19. However, the loss of life attributable to the virus is happening disproportionately in communities of color. Data reveals an overrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and Native Americans among confirmed cases, hospitalized patients, and deaths relative to the prevalence of their populations (Artiga, Orgera and Corallo 2020). This higher risk extends even to children of color, who are five to eight times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 than are White children (Kim Et al 2020). The risk in these communities is exacerbated by a variety of factors

such as long-standing disparities in health and healthcare access, poverty, racial segregation, and employment in 'essential' low-wage jobs, all of which have been attributed to racism. Health disparities are gravely understudied in marketing despite health being a traditional focus of research on marketing and public policy. The interlocking and reinforcing nature of factors that make communities of color more susceptible to the coronavirus highlights the deadly nature of persistent racial discrimination and the need for research that addresses the transdisciplinary impact of racism across domains (Crockett and Grier, 2020).

More broadly, CRT can contribute to a deeper understanding of a host of practical challenges at the intersection of race, marketing, and efforts to increase consumer and societal well-being. Ongoing controversies related to marketing promotions and service discrimination suggest that investigating how marketers can create campaigns and service policies informed by CRT principles is a fruitful area for future research. Scholars may examine, for example, how the pervasive use of colorblindness impacts service design, efficiency, and use, providing important data for the design of service policies to support consumer equity. The relative lack of research which makes race central also suggests a plethora of potential future research projects that elevate the voices of POC. For example, research may consider how POC storytelling approaches align or conflict with practitioner or scholarly approaches. Examination of such issues would move us towards a more comprehensive understanding of the role of race and racism in the marketplace experiences and outcomes of all consumers.

## **Conclusion**

Our aim is to provoke additional thought and research related to race in the marketplace. Rather than serve as a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of CRT and all possible

applications to issues of race in the marketplace, our work should stimulate thinking about the ways in which research on race can be transformed—and leveraged—to foster marketplace equity and consumer well-being. The importance of the way we currently conceive and approach race in relation to issues of consumption, marketing, and the policies that govern these cannot be overstated in today's environment. Our analysis demonstrates how CRT can support both broader and more nuanced understandings of the role of race and racism in the marketplace. Considering race through the framework of CRT can help us to better understand consumers' lived experiences and better catalog and explain the role of race in marketing and consumption. Inequality and racism are undoubtedly societal challenges, yet we do not view race as inherently problematic. Rather, we also acknowledge the idealistic, liberatory, and freedom aspects of race-related research. CRT moves the focus beyond the representational level (of who is depicted in marketing, who is targeted, etc.) and involves a historical contextualization (reflection on racist and Colonial histories, etc.) which shifts the focus from diversity and inclusion to equity and liberation. Equity captures the notion that people get what they need versus everyone getting the same thing. Given the reality of differentially situated groups in society based on historical, social, and economic factors, the CRT focus on dissecting these realities for those often ignored or understudied can help marketers and marketing be a force for moving society to one that is more equitable and thus bring about greater well-being for all consumers across markets.

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For Peer Review

**Table 1: Traditional vs. Transformative CRT Approaches in Marketplace Studies Across Tenets**

<b>CRT Tenet</b>	<b>Underpinning</b>	<b>Traditional Perspective (Example in italics)</b>	<b>Transformative CRT Perspective (Example in italics)</b>
<b><i>Social justice</i></b>	Attempts to eliminate racial oppression through fairness, equality and equity in distributions, procedures and interactions related to marketing scholarship, practice, and pedagogy	Neutral objective research goals and orientation  <i>e.g., Corporate apologies for racist behavior as incident that is viewed as an isolated problem.</i>	Social justice as a key goal and research should be action oriented  <i>e.g., View racist incidents as reflective of structural racism that need to be confronted using specific action steps to address it.</i>
<b><i>Centrality and permanence of racism</i></b>	Acknowledgment of race as a social construct that invokes hierarchical power and serves to distribute and restrict privilege between racialized bodies	Comparison of behaviors and attitudes across racialized groups based on dominant societal norms. Sets a standard or deems some (arbitrary) criteria as important so as to determine whether someone is worthy of privileges.  <i>e.g., Consumer behavior studies that compare behaviors, choices, or outcomes of POC to White people, positioning White people as the baseline standard.</i>	Naming and challenging White supremacy and manifestations in the marketplace; acknowledging the structural underpinnings of racial hierarchies and the colonial legacies that have shaped contemporary marketplace activities  <i>e.g., Critiquing examples of 'Blackface' in consumer culture and outlining its roots in centuries of anti-black racism.</i>
<b><i>Challenge to dominant ideology</i></b>	Rejection of dominant ideological concepts, such as neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy as a means to address inequities resulting from racism	Seeks commonalities across cultural groups, arbitrarily deem certain commonalities as important, and uphold such findings as the ideological standard of beliefs, practices, and norms.  <i>e.g., Privileged idea of Eurocentric tastes, preferences, and features as standards of beauty, patronage, and product design.</i>	Seeks to challenge White supremacy and racial power and to shine light on how policies, laws (and their enforcement), media, marketing, etc., perpetuate and maintain racial power over time; involves reflexive consideration of how different subjectivities shape research  <i>e.g., Recognizing and analyzing how the normativity of White identities influence marketplace relations and marketplace studies.</i>
<b><i>Centrality of experiential knowledge</i></b>	Lived experiences of POC are paramount to “analyze and counter power-laden	Segments and prioritizes consumer groups in market to minimize use of resources and maximize results.	Critiques central and taken-for-granted marketing practices and approaches that do not consider diversity of consumer lived experiences

	beliefs” of the dominant majority mindset	<i>e.g., Corporate focus on target segments results in the selective valorization of the lived experiences of typically White middle-class consumers.</i>	<i>e.g., Recognizes and valorizes the lived experiences of all consumers, in particular the value and power of POC.</i>
<b>Interdisciplinary/ Transdisciplinary</b>	Integration of a variety of fields to analytically “make sense” of society’s racial dynamics at a given moment in time	Utilization of two or more academic disciplines or professional specializations (typically economics, sociology, psychology, management and finance) to solve specific marketing problems.  <i>e.g., Research on obesity typically integrates consumer research on food attitudes and preferences within a psychological framework to understand food choice and eating behavior without reference to the racialized nature of foodways and influence of differential media use and exposure to food marketing .</i>	Issue-focused research practice that follows responsive or iterative methodologies; goes beyond interdisciplinary so that two or more disciplinary approaches transcend one another to form a new holistic approach. The outcome will be completely different from what one would expect from the addition of the parts.  <i>e.g., Conducting rigorous analysis of the interdependency of racism and capitalism, such as histories of slavery and exploitation that underpin contemporary markets using a wide cross-section of approaches</i>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The intersecting nature and impact of structural oppression and histories of subjugation (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, heteronormativity)	Treatment of marginalized groups as unidimensional (i.e., single context, such that only one contextual factor, such as race or gender, is placed under examination) resulting in quantitative treatment of variables  <i>e.g., Focus on single characteristics erases comprehensive understanding of (dis)advantage to particular groups.</i>	Centers race and racism as its analytical focal point while recognizing other identity coordinates from which experiences of privilege and oppression emerge, such as gender, class, and sexuality  <i>e.g., Understanding the nuanced advantage of specific intersections, such as White, male, heterosexual.</i>

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